

Evaluation of the Totally Touchable arts intervention project for sight impaired adults

Sharon Manship

Research Assistant, School of Public Health, Midwifery and Social Work

Professor Eleni Hatzidimitriadou

Head of Public Health, Midwifery and Social Work

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Contents

1. Executive Summary	5
2. Introduction	6
3. Background	7
4. Methodology	10
4.1 Design	10
4.2 Questionnaires	10
4.3 Interviews	10
4.4 Other qualitative data sources	11
4.5 Ethics	11
5. Findings	12
5.1 Questionnaire data	12
5.2 Qualitative data	14
5.2.1 Personal circumstances	14
5.2.2 Social bonding	15
5.2.3 Broadening horizons	15
5.2.4 Mental health benefits	16
5.2.5 Empowerment and confidence	17
5.2.6 Facilitating factors as to how sight impaired individuals participate in creative activities	18
5.2.7 Challenges experienced during the Totally Touchable project	19
5.2.8 Raising awareness and next steps	20
6. Discussion and Conclusion	21
7. Recommendations	24
8. References	25
<i>APPENDIX I: Questionnaire</i>	29
<i>APPENDIX II: Interview schedules</i>	31
<i>APPENDIX III: Information sheet</i>	33
<i>APPENDIX IV: Consent form</i>	35

List of tables and figures

Table 1:	Gender and age distribution of participants	12
Figure 1:	Mean WEMBWS scores of Totally Touchable participants compared to adult population average	13
Figure 1:	The KAB Gravesend art group working on sunflowers	14
Figure 2:	Participants working together on a task	15
Figure 3:	Activities providing fun and social interaction	17
Figure 4:	Learning new skill	18
Figure 5:	Facilitator, participant and Guide Dog at the exhibition	19

1. Executive Summary

This evaluation was designed in order to explore the impact of a person-centred intervention project of tactile art for sight impaired adults on their health and wellbeing. 'Totally Touchable' was instigated and delivered by an artist facilitator with specialist experience in working with blind and sight impaired participants, and overseen by a project coordinator. The project incorporated 14 artist-led sessions which took place over an eight week period in September and October 2015 and a final exhibition of the work produced followed the project delivery.

Questionnaires incorporating a wellbeing scale ('WEMWBS') were administered to participants at three time points during the project – beginning, mid-point and end. Total scores were collated and statistically analysed. Additionally, interviews were conducted with participants, facilitators and volunteers involved in the Totally Touchable project to elicit key themes regarding their experiences of the programme in terms of its impact on their health and wellbeing.

Findings from the evaluation indicate that WEMWBS (wellbeing) scores of participants increased during the life of the programme, and that clear psychological and social benefits were experienced, including social bonding, broadening horizons, enhanced mental health, increased empowerment and confidence and raised awareness of individuals with sight impairments.

Recommendations include the development and dissemination of a toolkit to assist those introduction similar interventions and exhibitions to ensure accessibility for sight impaired people and how to attract and inspire people to take part in arts activities; ensuring the venues for such projects are fit for purpose and that sessions are of an appropriate length; ensuring that the level of staffing/resources is adequate, to include support for the artist facilitator including practical assistance and potentially a mental health practitioner to support both the group members and facilitator. In addition, further research and evaluation is required in the area of the impact on the facilitator as well as on participants, and encouragement of commissioners is required to consider supporting arts for health projects for people who are sight impaired, and these projects should be longer-term, delivered to a wider population and incorporate comprehensive evaluations.

2. Introduction

In July 2015 Arts Council England's 'Grants for the Arts' programme, Gravesham Borough Council and Kent County Council funded the delivery of a programme called 'Totally Touchable', a person-centred tactile art project for sight impaired adults.

Totally Touchable was designed and facilitated by an independent artist who has specialist experience in working with blind and sight impaired participants. 14 artist-led sessions took place over an eight week period and the project culminated in a three week exhibition at a public art gallery. The aims of the project were: a) to increase active engagement and participation in arts activities; b) to deliver high quality creative arts; c) to encourage development of the creative community in the local area; and d) to raise awareness of sight impairments. In addition, the project set out to explore the experiences and engagement of the participants, as well as the impact of the intervention on their individual wellbeing, in order to obtain useful learning points for future projects and how to attract and inspire people to take part in arts activities.

The Totally Touchable artist facilitator is an experienced artist and creative practitioner who has been working in educational and community settings for 15 years, including work with Kent Association for the Blind art groups in other areas. Gravesham Borough Council's most recent corporate plan, adopted in October 2015, is focussed on delivering for the community and creating a safer, stronger and sustainable borough, including a healthier more cohesive community (GBC, 2015). Kent Association for the Blind is a registered charity who state that anyone who has a sight impairment should be able to live a fulfilled, healthy and safe life, exercise self-determination, make informed choices and achieve their own personal goals (KAB, 2015). They provide a wide range of support, help and services for people of all ages whose sight loss affects their daily lives.

Eight participants attended weekly Totally Touchable sessions at a community venue. Sessions were designed by the artist facilitator in response to conversations and consultation with the individuals taking part in order to ensure they were participant-led. Session activities were also tailored by the artist facilitator to individual abilities in order to achieve a person-centred approach. Participants, volunteers and all other involved persons in the project gave their permission for photographic material to be used for the purposes of the evaluation report.

3. Background

There is a paucity of research in the area of visual/sight impairment and creative arts. A literature search of relevant research databases revealed that only two of the ten relevant publications sourced referred to UK studies, with others coming from the USA, Japan, Taiwan and Israel. Projects discussed in the literature were mainly small-scale and focused on accessibility and wayfinding in museums and galleries, and interpreting art through touch and senses (Hayhoe, 2013b; Fryer et al, 2013; Handa et al, 2010; Poria et al, 2009). Some literature concentrated on techniques used by facilitators (Shih and Chao, 2010), the significance of the work of blind artists and making art and resource guides (Kent, 2001). None of the research evidence appeared to explore the impact of arts activities on participants in terms of wellbeing benefits.

The construct of wellbeing is often complex to define since it is experienced subjectively. One suggested definition of wellbeing is:

“a positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment” (Department of Health, 2010, p.12)

Staricoff et al (2004) suggest that a person can be physically ill, yet still maintain wellbeing since it is a state of acceptance of what is in the mind, body and spirit. The New Economics Foundation produced a concept of everyday wellbeing in its report regarding ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ (NEF, 2008), which aims to help people to understand the simple steps they can take to improve their lives, and is now widely adopted in health promotion initiatives and interventions. The Five Ways to Wellbeing are: connecting with others; being active; noticing things; maintaining learning; and giving. The ‘Live it Well’ programme in the south east of England suggests that the way we think and feel is just as important to a long and happy life as good food and physical exercise. Live It Well added a sixth element regarding caring for the planet (Live It Well, 2014), forming the local initiative of ‘Six Ways to Wellbeing’.

Marmot (2010) highlighted the importance of social networks and social participation, which act as protective factors to health and are consistently and positively associated with reduced morbidity and mortality. Marmot also drew attention to strong evidence that social relationships can reduce the risk of depression, and that people with stronger networks are happier and healthier. Ings et al (2012) suggest that arts and cultural work can help to build social integration, and a growing body of evidence highlights the physical, psychological and social benefits provided by participating in creative arts activities, including the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities, enhanced social interaction and connectedness, confidence, self-esteem, mood and concentration, the learning of new skills and increased levels of wellbeing (Clift and Camic, 2015; Manship, 2015; Manship and Hatzidimitriadou, 2015; Reynolds and Vivat, 2010; Timmons and Macdonald, 2008; D’Lima, 2004; Wikström, 2002; Calman, 2000).

Key to the discussion of beneficial outcomes from creative arts activities is the concept of eudaimonia, which sees wellbeing as an active phenomenon characterised by meaningful engagement, relationships and personal growth (Swindells et al, 2013). Swindells et al (2013) suggest that arts and health research is compatible with the field of eudaimonia since its interest is in human flourishing and understanding of wellness as more than an absence of dysfunction or disease. Furthermore, Waterman (1993) posits that eudaimonia is associated with personal expressiveness and self-realisation, which aligns well with the premise of creative arts. Manship (2015) suggests that the Live It Well (2014) Six Ways link closely with the concept of eudaimonic wellbeing since they share common themes. Both concepts also align with building resilience which

is important for positive mental health and wellbeing, through taking part in activities which are meaningful (Oliver et al, 2006) and experiencing feelings of connectedness (Stewart et al, 2004). The two concepts are also linked with a sense of belonging, which has been flagged as one possible outcome of artistic engagement in research (White, 2003; Stickley, 2012).

Kent (2001) suggested that hunger for art is part of the human condition, regardless of visual acuity. Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community (United Nations 2012), and in Europe and around the world many efforts have been made to include people with visual impairments and blindness into cultural life (Braille Authority 2012, Brvar 2010, European Blind Union 2011, Wright 2009, Kennedy 2003, Salzhauer and Sobol 2003, Kurze 1996).

Objects and artefacts exhibited in museums for people with visual impairments are available either by direct touch of the original or its 3D reproduction. Paintings though require a different approach and usually a tactile adaptation is created. Two often used techniques are the microcapsule technique (Braille Authority 2012) and the thermovacuum technique (Renner 1992). A newer technique, the Roland UV LEC-330 (Roland 2012), uses an inkjet printer which uses a special varnish that can be cured by ultraviolet light to generate raised relief surfaces printed layer by layer. Krivec et al (2014) suggested that using this technique for creating a tactile adaptation of fine arts for people with visual impairments enables their participation in their cultural heritage.

Vogelpoel and Jarrold (2014) suggest that integrated services, combining arts-based participation and voluntary sector support, can create positive health and wellbeing outcomes for older people, and programmes can help combat social isolation amongst those with sensory impairments. Other benefits include increased self-confidence, new friendships and increased mental wellbeing. This mixed-methods study incorporated collecting quantitative wellbeing scores throughout the course of the programme, conducting interviews with participants and observations.

An evaluation of a programme aiming to develop creative abilities among visually impaired children by Al-Dababneh et al (2015) suggested that the environment was prepared with the necessary tools to enrich training activities, and participants were allotted sufficient time to deal with stimuli to stimulate and explore their creative thinking. Participants were subjected to activities that prompted their imagination, motivation, curiosity, fluency, flexibility, originality of ideas, and related to real life. Al-Dababneh et al (2015) concluded that the creative abilities of the participants were developed as a result of the programme.

Hayhoe (2008a) found that congenitally and early blind students had been denied visual arts in their early school life, resulting in a lack of self-confidence in both the performance and appreciation of the arts. Hayhoe (2013a) suggested that visually impaired students had as much potential to develop art works as their sighted counterparts. The exclusion of blind students from art education in schools and museums is due to inaccurate information about blindness in educational literature and a lack of training of art teachers, particularly in mainstream education (Hayhoe, 2008a; Hayhoe 2000). This not only led to students being unable to participate in art lessons but to a belief by educators that these students were incapable of any similar art tasks during later education (Hayhoe, 2008b).

Although there is a paucity of research in the area of creative arts interventions for people who are sight impaired, there are number of studies which explore the needs of those affected by sight impairments when visiting museums where multisensory approaches have become common. The studies recommend improving accessibility of exhibitions and collections, improving accessibility to staff assistance and providing increased verbal directions (Handa et al, 2010; Fryer et al, 2013). Kusayama (2005) suggests further research is needed to identify criteria for sight impaired people to

touch, and that human assistance is important so training for staff/volunteers and knowledge sharing is necessary. For blind visitors, proximity to works of art is at least as important as perceiving the art itself (Hayhoe 2013b). Learning within the museum environment, physically next to works of art, fulfilled a social, cultural, interpersonal and emotional need for the blind participants in Hayhoe's study, particularly those who, as children, had experiences with works of art and museums.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the Totally Touchable project was focused on exploring the impact of the arts activities on the participants and other people involved (artist facilitator, coordinator, volunteers) in terms of wellbeing, social interaction, engagement and learning new skills, as well as raising awareness of sight impairments.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design

A longitudinal observational design was adopted with baseline and follow-up assessments using a validated questionnaire, supplemented by qualitative accounts from participants.

4.2 Questionnaires

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale ('WEMWBS') was employed as an outcome measure for this evaluation. Permission to use WEMWBS was obtained from University of Warwick, and copyright for the scales rests with the University of Warwick and NHS Health Scotland.

WEMWBS is a population level survey instrument designed to measure positive wellbeing. The questionnaire comprises 14 items that relate to an individual's state of mental wellbeing (thoughts and feelings) in the previous two weeks. Responses are made on a five-point scale ranging from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time' (Stewart-Brown and Janmohamed, 2008). Examples of items included in WEMWBS are 'I've been feeling relaxed', 'I've been feeling good about myself', 'I've been feeling confident' and 'I've been feeling cheerful'. The WEMWBS items are scored from 1 to 5 respectively, giving a total score between 14 and 70, with higher scores equating to more positive mental wellbeing. A large scale survey of a representative sample of adults in England in 2012 reported a mean WEMWBS score of 52.3 (Taggart et al, 2015).

Because population scores on WEMWBS approximate to a normal distribution with few studies showing ceiling or floor effects, WEMWBS can be expected to capture the full spectrum of positive mental health. This makes the scale suitable for monitoring mental wellbeing trends over time in population samples and for monitoring and evaluating the effect of mental health promoting programmes or interventions (Taggart et al, 2015). Whilst WEMWBS is not designed as a clinical tool to monitor mental wellbeing at individual level, it is being used by some investigators who report that it can be valuable in this context. In this context an improvement or deterioration of three or more points can be suggested as important, and people with a score of less than or equal to 40 could be at high risk of major depression and should be advised to seek help. Those with scores between 41 and 45 should be considered as at high risk of psychological distress and increased risk of depression (Taggart et al, 2015).

Basic demographic data was also collected along with responses to the WEMWBS scales. Seven out of the eight participants completed questionnaires, which were read out and completed for individuals by the researcher, at each of the three time points. The results of the completed questionnaires were coded and statistically analysed with the use of statistical software package SPSS (see Appendix I for a copy of the questionnaire).

4.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the views of participants, volunteers, the artist facilitator and the project coordinator and about the impact and benefits of the Totally Touchable project. In total, out of eight participants, seven were interviewed, along with both of the volunteers involved in the project and the artist facilitator and project coordinator. The structure allowed some control and focus to be maintained during the interviews, while at the same time enabling participants to express their own views about how the project had worked. It also

permitted the interview to be conducted in an informal way in a conversational manner, even though a set of prompt questions were used to guide the interaction (Holloway & Wheeler 2002).

All interviews were conducted face to face in a private room at the community venue in which the project took place. With the written and verbal consent of the participants all the interviews were digitally recorded.

Preliminary coding involved reading and re-reading the data, then labelling quotations and sections according to their content. This was followed by thematic analysis to identify their relationship to preliminary themes and/or link themes together. The second stage of analysis grouped the broader topics and identified overarching themes. The criteria for identifying themes were according to their prevalence across the interview data and relevance to the main questions under investigation (impact on wellbeing, social interaction, confidence, skills learnt, etc.). The overarching themes were then considered in relation to the aforementioned frameworks and literature regarding creative arts, health and wellbeing (see Section 3: Background) in order to investigate any potential relationships between them.

The qualitative analysis further enhanced the results of the data quantitative data analysis of the questionnaires and helped to identify further key themes regarding the impact, benefits and challenges experienced as a result of the Totally Touchable project, as well as suggestions of any improvements that could be made. A copy of the interview schedules used can be found in Appendix II.

4.4 Other qualitative data sources

The questionnaires administered to participants included a section asking for feedback on their experiences and whether they felt they had benefitted in any way from joining the group. This feedback was incorporated in the qualitative analysis.

A film produced for the Totally Touchable project by Spaghetti Weston Ltd¹ was transcribed and used as an additional source of qualitative data. Also, additional feedback sent via email from a relative of one of the participants to the artist facilitator was also included in analysis.

4.5 Ethics

The proposal for the evaluation of the project was submitted for ethical review under the Canterbury Christ Church University protocol for proportionate ethical review, and fully complied with the University's research governance requirements. An information sheet was prepared for participants about the evaluation and methods to enable them the opportunity to consider their involvement and ask questions before providing their written consent, which included giving permission to digitally record the interviews (see Appendices III and IV for copies of these documents). All quotations from written comments on the questionnaires and comments made during interviews are given anonymously.

¹ The Totally Touchable film is available to view at: <https://vimeo.com/144599869>

5. Findings

5.1 Questionnaire data

Questionnaires were administered at three time intervals – beginning (T1), mid-point (T2) and end of the intervention (T3) – and final wellbeing scores were calculated for each participant. The internal consistency of the overall scale was excellent at all three time points – Cronbach’s Alpha values were 0.914 (T1), 0.931 (T2) and 0.909 (T3).

Although there were 8 participants in the original sample, only 7 were included in the analysis of data since one participant was not available to complete the final WEMWBS questionnaire or take part in an interview with the researcher. Table 1 below shows the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1: Gender and age distribution of participants

	Male	Female	Total
Age			
50-59	2	1	3 (43%)
60-69	0	1	1 (14%)
70-79	0	2	2 (29%)
80 and over	0	1	1 (14%)
Total	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	7 (100%)

Each of the 14 item responses in WEMWBS are scored from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time) and a total score is calculated by summing the 14 individual item scores. The minimum score is 14 and the maximum score is 70, with higher scores equating to more positive mental wellbeing. The data collected showed that the mean wellbeing scores of the participants increased throughout the duration of the Totally Touchable project. Figure 1 below illustrates the increases and also shows how they compare to the adult population mean of 52.3 (Stranges et al, 2014)².

² The Health Survey for England assessed the mental wellbeing of participants in order to examine the association between behavioural risk factors and mental health. The study was large-scale (13,983 participants) and used WEMWBS as the assessment tool, and therefore was a suitable measure for comparison in this evaluation

Figure 1: Mean WEMWBS scores of Totally Touchable participants compared to adult population average

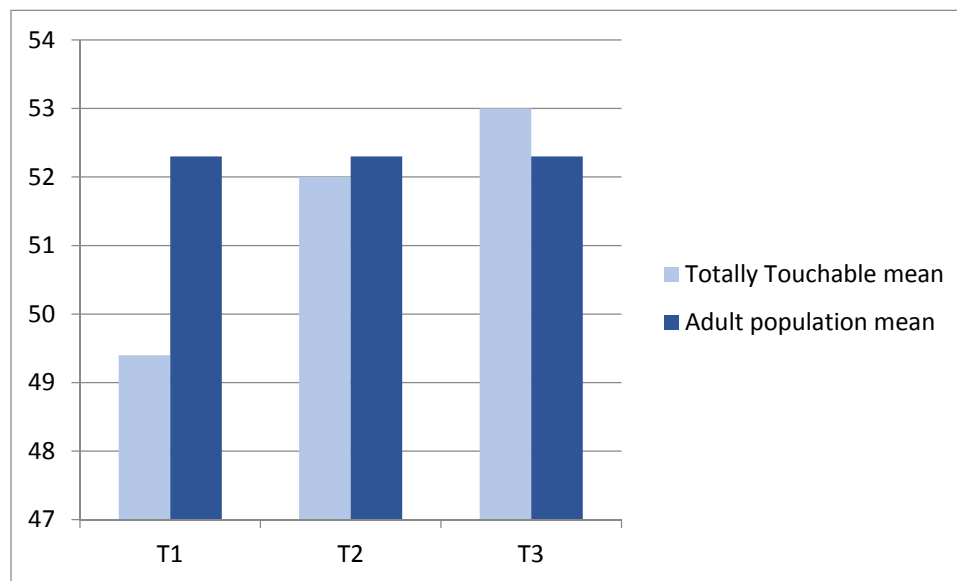


Figure 1 shows that at the beginning of the intervention (T1), the WEMWBS mean (49.4, $sd=8.02$) is nearly three points lower than the adult population of 52.3. At the mid-point (T2) the WEMWBS mean is almost the same (52, $sd=8.41$), and at the end of the project (T3) it is slightly higher (53, $sd=8.02$). Although wellbeing scores increased between data collection points T1 and T3, the changes were not statistically significant (0.216). Similarly, differences between each of the three WEMWBS average measurements and the corresponding population value ($M = 52.3$) are not statistically significant, but we can easily attribute this to the small sample size.

WEMWBS results are more likely to be significant if the groups being compared are large and less likely if the groups are small. The sample in this study was small ($n=7$) and therefore limited, so a power analysis was carried out to establish how many participants would have been required in this case in order to obtain a significant result, and the outcome was that in order to detect a moderate effect size with an alpha level of .05 and a minimum power of Beta+.8, 30 participants would have been needed. Therefore the noted differences can only be treated as a trend rather than a statistically significant difference. Nonetheless, this is a useful indicator of the potential impact such an activity can have on participants' wellbeing.

When each statement of the WEMWBS tool was looked at separately, there were certain elements of wellbeing that seemed to be driving overall scores changes and were statistically significant. These statements were: 'I've been able to make up my own mind about things' ($p=0.34$), and 'I've been interested in new things' ($p=0.28$). Interestingly, there is also a statistically significant correlation ($p=0.23$) between the participant's age and the change in wellbeing scores, with the older the participant is the bigger the change. The biggest change was in the participant in the 70-79 years category, and lowest changes were in two participants in the 50-59 years category.



Figure 6: The KAB Gravesend art group working on sunflowers

5.2 Qualitative data

The analysis of the interview data uncovered a number of key themes which are presented below.

5.2.1 Personal circumstances

Participants reported living with a wide range of issues which had resulted in either impaired sight or, in some cases, complete loss of sight. Some participants had been affected by conditions since childhood, such as microphthalmus and nystagmus, whereas others had been affected in later life with conditions including cataracts, macular degeneration and autoimmune and inherited diseases.

The sight impairments that the participants were living with affected their daily life to varying degrees. Some had issues with adjusting to different lighting, others were not able to see things clearly that were up close or far away, and some could only see light and shade. Two of the participants had guide dogs to assist them in their day to day life.

More than half of the participants talked about having experienced the loss of their partner, and others reported having caring responsibilities for spouses or family members either currently or in the past. Many of those who were interviewed spoke about feeling isolated and finding it hard to get out and do the things they would like to or used to do. A quote from one participant was particularly poignant and emphasised the importance of them being part of projects such as Totally Touchable:

"I have no more family or friends. I live at home alone...If I didn't get out to projects such as these it would be very lonely...I think it's a life saver." [participant G05]

Most of the participants had been interested in art from a young age and some had continued to do art at school or college, but reported that they had done little or nothing creative since their sight had deteriorated either because they had lost interest or felt that they were no longer able to do so. These participants saw the Totally Touchable project as a way to return to art and realise their need to create. Feedback from the family member of a participant highlighted a renewed sense of spirit as a result of taking part in the project:

“After the last couple of years and since she lost her sight five years ago it was so good to see her come to life again.” [relative feedback]

5.2.2 Social bonding

The most commonly mentioned benefit of the Totally Touchable project that participants reported was the opportunity for social interaction – to meet new people, mix with others, create and maintain relationships and to be part of a community or group. One participant suggested that it was easier and more comfortable to interact with others who were in a similar position to them:

“It’s quite difficult if you’ve got visual impairment to interact in a fully sighted group, because people tend not to talk to you. Because you can’t make eye contact people tend to ignore you and it is very, very difficult to break into a group.” [participant G06]

Another participant remarked on people’s faith in others being restored having gone through adversities, and realising the benefits of social interaction:

“It’s reminded a couple of people that life is good and people are good, and they actually really like people and need to be around people a bit more often.” [participant G10]

There were also reports of participants as well as volunteers socialising outside of the Totally Touchable sessions with people that they would not have known had it not been for the project. Many participants spoke about Totally Touchable providing a meaningful purpose and aim to look forward to, fill their time and help them to feel less isolated and an enhanced sense of belonging:

“I just feel a bit more useful, practical, as well as social, you know? I’m more involved with normal life, whereas without this you’re not, are you? You’re just sat on the sidelines out the way, hidden, you know? Out of sight out of mind, sort of.” [participant G05]



Figure 7: Participants working together on a task

5.2.3 Broadening horizons

All participants reported that they had learnt new skills as a result of the Totally Touchable project through using materials that they had not used before, regaining old skills and learning new ways of doing things. Through tailoring the activities to individual needs, such as using raised rather than flat images, using large sheets of paper and working on sculptures and tactile art, there was a sense that,

despite their sight impairments, the artist facilitator had made art more engaging and accessible to the participants. This was especially true for the one participant who had not done any art before joining the group:

"I always thought I never had a creative bone in my body. I thought 'I can't do this'...People think there are things that blind people can do and things that blind people can't do, and there are more things that we can do than there are things we can't do. We just do things in a slightly different way." [participant G06]

One of the facilitators suggested that this tailoring of activities *"the smallest change or output in a project"* can *"make the biggest difference to people with visual impairment or a disability"* [participant G11].

Some participants had found the activities challenging, but reflected that being given the opportunity to try something new and obtain a positive result led to a greater sense of achievement. One of the facilitators reflected on an example of this for one participant who was not very confident in her artistic abilities at the outset of the project:

"She had that tactile sunflower next to her...she felt it and she drew the most beautiful sunflower...It was amazing! She was really chuffed, I was really chuffed, and she's then since done it again and again and got others to do it as well." [participant G10]

Other experiences and opportunities had opened up as a result of being involved in the art group, such as visiting the artist's studio and being invited to the Mayor's Tea Party, as well as two of the volunteers helping out at each other's groups outside of the art group. One participant commented that they had taken more of an interest in art as a result of Totally Touchable:

"I'm sort of looking at different branches of art and looking at...the artists...I think it's given me a more positive outlook on the arts, which I did have before but I've gone more in-depth...you learn about the artist, you learn about the art, how it's done. I think it does expand the mind, you know?" [participant G08]

5.2.4 Mental health benefits

All participants reported that the taking part in the Totally Touchable sessions had had a positive impact on their mental health in terms of providing them with enjoyment, improving their mood and enabling them to relax, which resulted in decreased stress levels:

"It makes you feel relaxed and when you're relaxed your stress levels go down and you just feel good about the world." [participant G01]

Others found that the mindful nature of creative arts, sitting down and concentrating, provided a means of positive distraction and escapism from the stresses and issues they faced:

"It's sort of like a focus...they have such a tough time and they know that they've got that coming every Monday, so no matter what else has happened that week, it's that two hour window where life is just different." [participant G11]

"It takes you away from daily pressures and struggles, you know? For people like me who have nothing else, and nobody around you, you really need it for your own sanity...I think it's

healthy, mentally it's good for people...I think it's so important for everybody to escape their daily life, even just for a short while." [participant G05]



Figure 8: Activities providing fun and social interaction

5.2.5 Empowerment and confidence

It was apparent that the artist facilitator had provided a great deal of encouragement and support to individuals and created an environment in which participants felt safe to explore different mediums and ways of doing things. This approach was much valued by participants:

"I was dismissed as being thick, useless with arts and crafts at school, left at the back to muck around. Nobody tells you that here." [feedback on questionnaire]

As the project progressed the group members also became increasingly encouraging of each other:

"Everybody is very supportive of each other, so if someone says 'oh it's rubbish, I can't do it' everyone's 'just have a go, just have a go' and trying to jolly them along to see that it's all experimentation, it's all play." [participant G10]

As a result of the project, participants felt an increased sense of empowerment and confidence:

"It's made me more willing to try to do something different...I'm meeting very kind people and doing more than I was doing for myself." [participant G03]

Involvement in the project also had a positive impact on the confidence of the artist facilitator who reported that she felt proud of her work, its value and the achievement of delivering the sessions, particularly since it was originally planned that the project would employ a student to assist her with the facilitation but due to unforeseen circumstances this did not happen. The artist facilitator had also made some useful further connections with other useful organisations as a result of the project, which she felt would not have happened otherwise.



Figure 9: Learning new skills

5.2.6 Facilitating factors as to how sight impaired individuals participate in creative activities

There were a number of elements of the Totally Touchable project that contributed to its positive outcomes. One of the most commonly cited aspects throughout the interviews was the tailoring by the artist facilitator of a variety of arts activities to suit individual capabilities. The artist facilitator advised that she ensured she kept activities flexible and person-centred by getting individuals to a point where they felt comfortable and had been given the chance to have a go at a particular activity, and then it was their choice whether to continue with it or move on to something else. One participant commented on the value of this approach in increasing their confidence and sense of achievement:

"[The facilitator] is very perceptive, she somehow knows the challenges and problems that sight impaired people have and she brings it to life, she makes it tactile, and suddenly you can do it all again." [participant G05]

The artist facilitator also gave an example of a participant discovering *"something she didn't think she could do"* as a result, and this was echoed in the discourses of many other participants.

The artist facilitator ensured that activities were participant-led by asking them for ideas and memories and initiating discussions whereby she could draw out some themes to respond to, which made the content of the sessions and the work produced more meaningful to individuals.

All participants praised the positivity, experience and enthusiasm of the artist facilitator. Participants reported that they felt inspired, gently encouraged to step outside their comfort zones and that the artist facilitator worked very hard to make the project a success, which was greatly appreciated.

Having different people involved in the project (the artist facilitator, Gravesham Borough Council and Kent Association for the Blind) and working collaboratively was felt to be of benefit to those facilitating and managing the project in terms of creating links to different organisations and sources

of information and guidance. Also, each party was able to take responsibility for different aspects of the project, rather than it being completely dependent on one individual.

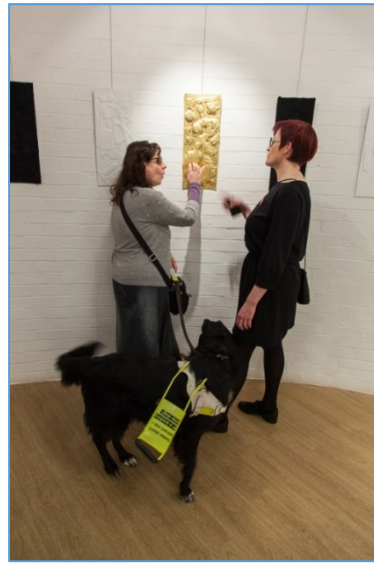


Figure 10: Facilitator, participant and Guide Dog at the exhibition

5.2.7 Challenges experienced during the Totally Touchable project

Some participants felt challenged by the creative activities, but this was mostly thought to be a positive experience. The one or two participants who were slightly negative on occasions soon found that their challenges were overcome with the encouragement and support of the artist facilitator:

"I think that's a normal group thing, there's always someone who doesn't feel comfortable doing something but then they overcome that and they'll just tweak the way they do it."
[participant G11]

Comments were made by participants regarding the fact that they would like the sessions to be longer to allow them more time to create artwork. Additionally, participants felt somewhat restricted in the community room venue as they had to take care not to make too much mess which they felt could restrict their creativity. The artist facilitator also needed to bring along all the materials to each session. This issue was somewhat resolved by the artist facilitator using their studio space for sessions on a couple of occasions, however this was not ideal in terms of size and accessibility.

The artist facilitator felt that they had learnt different ways of creating and of tailoring activities to suit individual needs as a result of the project, and felt positive about sharing their knowledge and experience with others. However, the main challenges experienced were those on behalf of the artist facilitator, firstly in terms of the physical impact of delivery. Since the original plan to employ a student to assist with delivery of the project did not come to fruition, the artist facilitator was delivering every session on their own which was intense work and required using a lot of their own resources, energy and time, as well as not being as able to create their own artwork in response to the project. The artist facilitator benefited from the input of the volunteers who assisted with sessions and their input was very much appreciated, especially in light of the project staffing issues.

The artist facilitator also experienced further challenges in respect of concern about issues some participants were experiencing:

“On a practical note I’ve definitely been a pair of hands down...I feel it on my shoulders as well...that’s probably the heavy feeling. I can signpost others, I can’t signpost me...As people start feeling comfortable to talk...all sorts of conversations are coming out...and I’m a sponge...I soak it all up, can’t let it out.” [participant G10]

Much as the artist facilitator felt the need to help and support the participants they also recognised that they were *“not the substitute for the void in their lives...not the 24/7 helpline”* and that it could be detrimental to her own mental health to take on responsibility for their wellbeing. However, the artist facilitator found it challenging to find the right balance and keep a professional distance when individuals were so obviously in need of support.

Due to time constraints and availability of the exhibition space there was also not much time between the end of project delivery and the exhibition, which impacted further on the health and wellbeing on those facilitating and managing the project.

5.2.8 Raising awareness and next steps

The three week exhibition at a public gallery at the end of the Totally Touchable project showcased the tactile artwork made during the sessions, and visitors were encouraged to touch and pick up items on display. As a result, awareness was raised amongst the general public as well as those involved in facilitating and managing the project regarding the issues that those with sight impairments face. One participant commented on the benefit of raising awareness:

“The general public, it will make them think too. Because before I was like this, because I’ve not been born blind, these things didn’t occur to me either...it’s great, these projects, putting it out to the public for awareness...when I was growing up they didn’t seem to be around...so it’s a good thing.” [participant G05]

Following the project the facilitators advised that they would be putting together a toolkit to guide others carrying out creative arts and curating exhibitions to take into account what would make them accessible for sight impaired people.

All those involved in the Totally Touchable project were disappointed that it had come to an end and hoped that there would be funding awarded for follow-on projects in the near future.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This evaluation demonstrates that the Totally Touchable project had a positive impact on the wellbeing of the participants and provided clear psychological and social benefits, which contributed to meeting the overall aim of the project to increase engagement and participation in arts activities in the local area.

In terms of the quantitative feedback, statistical analysis showed that composite wellbeing scores increased from the beginning of the intervention to the end to above the adult population mean. Although the changes in the composite wellbeing scores were not statistically significant, Taggart et al (2015) suggest that a relevant assessment of the scores is whether a change on WEMWBS is recognisable by the respondent as of importance, and that a change of three or more points in scores is likely to be an important change to the individual. People with a score of less than or equal to 40 could be at high risk of major depression and should be advised to seek help. Those with scores between 41 and 45 should be considered as at high risk of psychological distress and increased risk of depression.

In this evaluation there was one participant who scored less than 40 at the beginning of the project (39), indicating risk of major depression; interestingly their score showed the biggest increase at the end of the project to 55 (+16 points). Also, there were two participants who scored between 41 and 45 at the beginning of the project (both 44), indicating risk of psychological distress; one of them had the second biggest increase (by 10 points) by the end of the project, and the other one decreased by 5 points. When the interview data for the participant whose score decreased was further analysed it became apparent that the day they completed the questionnaire marked the anniversary of a bereavement they had suffered and they acknowledged it was a particularly low period for them during the year, so this may have had a resulting negative impact on their response to the WEMWBS statements. There was also one other participant whose score decreased; the reasons for this could not be established by the researcher. The only factors for consideration is that this participant (one of the two males in the group) started with the highest score of the group (62), which is well above the mean of the adult population (52.3), and when it decreased it was to 57, which was the second highest score at the end of the project and is still higher than the mean of the adult population. Overall, the majority of wellbeing scores increased by the end of the project, which indicates an importance change to those individuals.

There were certain statements on WEMWBS that seemed to be driving the overall scores changes and were statistically significant. These were statements relating to participants being able to make up their own mind about things, and being interested in new things. This may denote that impact of this activity could be particularly focused on participants' locus of control, self-confidence and optimism, as well as meaningful engagement, an element of eudaimonia. There was also a statistically significant correlation between the participant's age and the change in wellbeing scores, with the older the participant was the bigger the change.

The qualitative data highlighted improvements for participants in terms of increased social interaction, something that is very important for individuals who are often socially isolated. This outcome links with one of the 'Six Ways to Wellbeing' (Live It Well, 2014) of connecting with others, with the concept of eudaimonia in terms of creating and maintaining positive relationships, as well

as aligning with the results of previous research in the area of creative arts activities and combatting social isolation (Manship and Hatzidimitriadou, 2015; Vogelpoel and Jarrold, 2014). Marmot (2010) also highlighted the importance of social networks and social participation, which act as protective factors to health and are consistently and positively associated with reduced morbidity and mortality. This key theme clearly emanated from the interview data and goes some way towards meeting one of the original aims of the project to encourage and develop a creative community in the local area. Participants also reported gaining new skills and learning different ways of doing things, which aligns with one of the 'Six Ways to Wellbeing' (Live It Well, 2014) of maintaining learning, as well as the personal growth element of eudaimonia.

One of the aims of the project was to deliver high quality creative arts, and this was achieved through the provision of the sessions by an experienced and encouraging independent artist who was able to tailor activities and be flexible to the needs and capabilities of individuals in order to facilitate the involvement of every participant and make activities accessible to them. The Totally Touchable sessions were person-centred and participant-led, making activities more meaningful to individuals, which is an aspect of eudaimonia and resulted in a sense of achievement. Being given the opportunity to take part in creative arts activities is something that many participants had been denied due to their sight impairment, which resulted in a lack of confidence and aligns with similar research findings in this area (Hayhoe, 2008a). The positive outcomes of the Totally Touchable project included enjoyment and increased confidence, self-esteem and empowerment of participants. Participants also experienced mental health benefits including improved mood, relaxation, stress release and escapism. These outcomes broadly support the findings of other studies that incorporate creative arts activities (Clift and Camic, 2015; Manship, 2015; Manship and Hatzidimitriadou, 2015; Vogelpoel and Jarrold, 2014; Reynolds and Vivat, 2010; Timmons and Macdonald, 2008; D'Lima, 2004; Wikström, 2002; Calman, 2000).

From the outset, one of the aims of the project was to obtain useful learning points for future projects regarding how to attract and inspire individuals to take part in arts activities. Following the project the facilitators will be developing a toolkit using what they have learnt from Totally Touchable to guide others who are carrying out creative arts and curating exhibitions on what would make them more accessible for sight impaired people. Another aim of the Totally Touchable project was to raise awareness of sight impairments, which was achieved through the curation of a three week public exhibition at the end of the project, the project film and will also be aided by the creation of the forthcoming toolkit.

Suggestions from participants for improving the Totally Touchable sessions included being situated in a more suitable venue. Although the community venue was large and light, many participants felt very aware of not spreading out, dropping things or making too much mess, which would have been less of an issue in a studio space, for example. Participants also suggested that the sessions could be made longer in duration to allow them more time to spend on activities. These findings align with those of Al-Dababneh et al (2015) who suggested that the environment is prepared with the necessary tools to enrich training activities and participants are allotted sufficient time to deal with stimuli to stimulate and explore their creative thinking.

The results of the evaluation demonstrated that collaborative working between those facilitating and managing the project (the artist and staff at Gravesham Borough Council as well as volunteers

from by Kent Association for the Blind) was of benefit to the overall success of the project, however it also clearly highlighted a large physical and mental strain on artist facilitator, which was partly due to the planned student/support artist not being able to take part. This issue highlighted the need for another level of support that is required for Totally Touchable and similar projects. This could be in the form of a mentor for the artist facilitator to maintain regular contact with and/or a mental health practitioner who can be on hand for the participants, but also meet with the artist facilitator following each session to discuss any issues that arose and how best to resolve them. The literature review conducted for this evaluation uncovered a gap in studies that explore the impact on the health and wellbeing of the facilitators who deliver the creative arts activities, and in light on the findings of this evaluation it is suggested that this is an area that needs further focus in future research.

The literature review also uncovered a paucity of research in the area of creative arts interventions for people who are sight impaired, with the majority that exists relating to individuals visiting museums and galleries rather than participating in arts activities themselves. This is therefore an area of activity and research which requires further focus and evaluation in order to strengthen the evidence base.

The main limitation of this evaluation was the small sample size ($n=7$) which limits generalisability of the statistical analysis. The absence of a control group also means that causality cannot be inferred. Future research should extend recruitment to a wider population. Although the results were positive, further analysis, development and evaluation is needed in the area of creative arts activities for sight impaired participants, so that statistically significant results can be obtained. Furthermore, commissioners should recognise the importance of including funding for evaluation in their plans.

Due to their sight impairment issues, the questionnaires were read out to participants by the researcher to obtain their answers verbally. Although there were no issues raised from any of the participants regarding this aspect of the data collection and all were happy and consented to participate in this way, WEMWBS has not been tested in interview situations where an interviewer reads out the items to respondents and fills in their responses for them, so it is unclear as to how robust WEMWBS is in these situations (Taggart et al, 2015).

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the evaluation, the impact and benefits of the Totally Touchable project are clearly apparent and it is suggested that further mechanisms are developed to effectively support such activities generally, including the incorporation of comprehensive evaluations in order to highlight their value.

The following recommendations are also suggested:

- A toolkit regarding how to improve the accessibility of creative arts/exhibitions accessible for sight impaired people and how to attract and inspire people to take part in arts activities that is being put together by the project facilitators should be developed and disseminated widely to relevant organisations
- Appropriate venues for similar creative arts interventions should be sourced in which participants have the space and opportunity to realise their full creative potential, for example a studio space
- Facilitators could consider extending the length of the sessions to over two hours to allow participants more time to time to deal with stimuli to stimulate and explore their creative thinking.
- Appropriate staffing resource should be of paramount importance from the outset of such projects, including at least a support artist to assist the artist facilitator, as well as considering employing a mental health practitioner to liaise with participants regarding any issues arising, but also to arrange regular meetings/feedback with the artist facilitator to support them with any issues involving themselves or the participants
- Further research and evaluation work should be carried regarding the exploration of the impact on the health and wellbeing of the facilitators who deliver the creative arts activities. As a basic requirement the facilitators could be interviewed for their feedback (as was the case with this evaluation), but could also complete wellbeing surveys alongside participants so that their scores can also be tracked and analysed accordingly
- Further research and evaluation is required regarding the impact on health and wellbeing of creative arts activities for sight impaired participants, given the current paucity of research in this area
- Commissioners to consider supporting arts for health projects involving people who are sight impaired which are longer-term and can be delivered to a wider population. Funding should be built into any future projects for further evaluative work of interventions

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APPENDIX I: Questionnaire

Totally Touchable Project Evaluation Questionnaire

Date:	Personal code:
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Gender:

Male		Female	
Other		Prefer not to say	

Age:

18-20		50-59	
20-29		60-69	
30-39		70 - 79	
40-49		80 and over	

We are very interested to have your feedback on your experience of the group so far. Tell us what you think of it and whether you feel you have benefited in any way from coming along.

--

Below are some statements about your thoughts and feelings. Please tick the box that best describes your experiences of each over the last TWO WEEKS.

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been feeling interested in other people					
I've had energy to spare					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling good about myself					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been feeling confident					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					
I've been feeling loved					
I've been interested in new things					
I've been feeling cheerful					

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – PARTICIPANTS

1) Could you tell me about your sight impairment and the impact that this has on your day-to-day life?

2) What interested you in participating in the Totally Touchable project?

Ask if they have been able to attend regularly

3) Do you think the Totally Touchable project has had any impact on your wellbeing?

Explore this in terms of mental, physical, emotional, spiritual...

4) Do you think the Totally Touchable project had any impact on your levels of social interaction?

If so, please explain how

5) Have you learnt any new skills as a result of being part of the Totally Touchable project?

6) What have you enjoyed most about the Totally Touchable project?

7) What have you enjoyed least about the Totally Touchable project?

8) *Is there anything that you would change about the project?*

9) Do you think the Totally Touchable project has helped to raise awareness of sight impairments?

If so, how and with who?

10) Do think you have benefitted overall from participating in the Totally Touchable project? If so, how? Examples?

11) How valuable/important has it been to you?

12) Are there any particularly memorable incidents, events or sessions that you recall during Totally Touchable project that you would like to share with me?

13) How did you find completing the questionnaires that were administered at the beginning, middle and end of the project? Any particular challenges?

14) Is there anything else that you would like to add about the Totally Touchable project and your experience of it?

Many thanks for your time and valued input.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – FACILITATORS & VOLUNTEERS

- 1) Can you tell me a bit about your role in the Totally Touchable project.
- 2) Do you think the Totally Touchable project has had any impact on the wellbeing of the participants? *Explore this in terms of mental, physical, emotional, spiritual...*
- 3) Do you think the Totally Touchable project had any impact on the social interaction of the participants? *If so, please explain how*
- 4) How engaged have the participants been? Where there any challenges in terms of engagement? *If so, please explain*
- 5) Do you think that participants have acquired new skills as a result of their participation? If so what new skills?
- 6) Do you think the Totally Touchable project has helped to raise awareness of sight impairments? *If so, how and with who?*
- 7) Have you experienced any difficulties during the delivery of the project? *Can you please give specific instances/examples?*
- 8) Do you think that the participants have benefitted from being involved in the project? *Can you please identify specific ways in which you have become aware of this?*
- 9) How valuable/important do you think the Totally Touchable project has been for participants/you?
- 10) Are there any particularly memorable incidents, events or stories that you recall during the Totally Touchable project that you would like to share with me?
- 11) Is there anything that you would change about the Totally Touchable sessions?
- 12) Is there anything else that you would like to add about the Totally Touchable project and your experience of it?

Many thanks for your time and valued input.

APPENDIX III: Information sheet

An Evaluation of the 'Totally Touchable' Project

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

An evaluation is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Sharon Manship from the School of Public Health, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing. Before you decide to take part in the study it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully before making a decision to take part in the study.

Background

The evaluation aims to gain an understanding of the impact and benefits that the 'Totally Touchable' project has on participants and other involved parties in terms of wellbeing, social interaction, engagement, learning new skills and raising awareness of sight impairments.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be asked to complete questionnaires and take part in an interview regarding their views and opinions.

To participate in this research you must:

Be a participant of or involved party in the 'Totally Touchable' Project, be aged 18 or over, and be able to articulate in English.

Procedures

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your wellbeing at the beginning and end of the project. You will also be invited to take part in a one to one interview with the researcher.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Sharon Manship. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

Dissemination of results

The results of the evaluation will be written up in the form of a report. The results may also be published in health journals.

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Any questions?

Please contact Sharon Manship, Research Assistant in the School for Public Health, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Canterbury Christ Church University Medway Campus, Rowan Williams Court, 30 Pembroke Court, Chatham Maritime, Kent ME4 4UF.

Email: sharon.manship@canterbury.ac.uk

Tel: 01634 894472

APPENDIX IV: Consent form

An Evaluation of the 'Totally Touchable' Project

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: An Evaluation of the 'Totally Touchable' Project

Name of Researcher: Sharon Manship

Contact details:

Address:	Canterbury Christ Church University Rowan Williams Court, 30 Pembroke Court Chatham Maritime, Kent, ME4 4UF
Tel:	01634 894472
Email:	sharon.manship@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read, or been read, and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential
4. I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes
5. I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____